Richard Sorger and Gareth Williams waited 12 years to renovate their Dalston house, turning a rabbit warren of rooms into an open plan home, says **Ruth Bloomfield**

We have

had quite

negative

reactions...

us though;

WHAT IT COST

house in 2007:

extension and

nearby houses

renovation:

£250,000

bedroom

we did it

it doesn't

a few

home'

hefirstthingyou vou arrive at Richard Sorger and Gareth Williams's house in Dalston is the euphoric welcome offered by Chunky, their 10-yearold Boston terrier.

The second thing is the kitchen, which is, well, rather pink — right from its concrete work tops and kitchen island to the paintwork on its floor-toceiling cabinets.

Predictably for a couple who are both thoroughly immersed in fashion and design, the inspiration for this stylish but rather polarising space came from a hip Swedish fashion house.

"It is actually the pink of Acne Studio's branding and bags, and we fell in love with it years ago," explains Sorger, 51, who is an associate professor in fashion at Kingston University.

To recreate the hue the couple hunted down a supplier of pink concrete and then colour matched its paint. Taps, pendant lights and hardware are all black, and the sides of the worktop are clad with a beautiful copper panel.

"We have had quite a few negative reactions to it - I think it is love it or hate it," says Williams, 55, who is head of the design department at Middlesex University. "It doesn't matter to us though; we did it for us not because we want to flip the house."

In fact, Williams and Sorger have owned their three-bedroom house since 2007, but lack of funds meant that they did not get around to rethinking its layout or its style until 2019.

"What we really liked about it was that it was wide, so the space was lateral," says Williams. "But it was in a bit of a state and the layout didn't work at all. It was a rabbit warren of small rooms with very little access to the house."

At the time, the only works they were in a position to do were cosmetic painting walls and installing an Ikea

"It was kind of papering over the cracks," says Sorger.



By 2019, Sorger and Williams had had enough of making do and hired Bradley Van Der Straeten architects to revamp the mid-19th-century house. They suggested gutting the ground floor, removing all but one of its main walls to get rid of the many separate rooms. To enlarge the living space, they designed a full-width extension pushing outward into the garden and rebuilt an old lean-to with an outrigger extension, which now houses the kitchen.

The back wall of the house is now mostly glass, which means that the garden takes centre stage wherever you are on the ground floor.

All the tearing down of walls meant that massive new steel beams needed to be inserted to hold the house up. Painted blue, these have been left exposed. The original floorboards were irreparably wonky and have been replaced by smart herringboned oak boards, while the original staircase, with its impractically steep and narrow treads, has been replaced by a smart enclosed plywood flight of steps.

Upstairs the back wall was torn down and the rear bedroom extended outward over the new kitchen, giving extra space to fit in a second bathroom.

The kitchen's pink theme is picked up here and there around the rest of the house, the living room sofa and the bedding in the master bedroom. In general Sorger and Williams went for a palette of rather sober greys and whites, plus natural materials including wood and exposed brick.

"There are actually not many colours in here," says Williams. "We didn't go for much pattern either.'

ALL IN THE DETAIL

Given their design backgrounds, the attention to detail in this project has been forensic — from the way the brick paving in the garden is designed to mirror the herringbone pattern of the internal floors, to the sight lines through the house so that almost everywhere you stand you can see the outdoors.

Even the new pond was carefully placed within a raised bed so it is possible to sit at the dining table and watch the fish swimming

One thing they didn't have to worry about when planning the house was furnishing. They already had a wonderful collection of modern design pieces (Williams was formerly a curator at the V&A's furniture department),

bit nervethat there was nobody on the site for weeks pandemic

and only invested in a new sofa to replace their rather ancient one and a larger dining table since they now have

SUMS AND SETBACKS

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The work was carried out between December 2019 and November 2020 and cost about £250,000 to execute, a sum comfortably covered by the area's rise in house prices since 2007.

The timing wasn't the best — the house was basically a building site when the first lockdown was announced in March 2020. "It was a bit nerve-wracking that our house had basically been knocked down and there was nobody working on the site for seven weeks at the start of the pandemic, but in the end it wasn't very delayed," says Williams.

The couple have been working from home at their newly renovated house for the past year or so, busy in the garden in their spare time, and are still thrilled with what they have achieved.

"I don't want to sound smug, but we are still really enjoying living here," says Williams. "The novelty hasn't worn off."



Green flash:

pieces

the entire ground floor has sight lines to the garden and there are even views of the fish pond from the dining table



glass walls mean the garden takes centre stage, righ and a bathroom features black fixtures pop against the min green tiling











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